

Appl. No. : 10/665,693
Filed : September 17, 2003

REMARKS

Claims 1-23 are currently pending. Claim 1 and 14 are amended herein.

Specification

The specification has been amended to add a reference to the issued patent number of the parent application.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-13 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Hofmeister, U.S. Patent No. 6,481,956. Claim 1 has been amended to recite a buffer station adjacent the first substrate handling chamber and located between the loadlock chamber and the front docking port, thus clarifying that the buffer station is separate from the other recited chambers.. This amendment is fully supported by the specification, as originally filed, at, for example paragraphs [0035]-[0037] and Fig. 1.

Hofmeister does not disclose or suggest a buffer station adjacent the first substrate handling chamber. In Hofmeister, the buffer cassettes B1-4 are cassettes, not stations and are located *within* the substrate handling chamber 13, not *adjacent* the substrate handling chamber. Furthermore, the buffer cassettes are not configured for separate purging (*see, e.g.*, Claim 4). Claim 1, as amended, is therefore patentable as it is not anticipated by Hofmeister. Claims 2-13, which depend from and include all of the limitations of amended Claim 1, are therefore also patentable over Hofmeister. Furthermore, each of the dependent claims recites further distinguishing features of particular utility.

Claims 14-16 and 18-23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Hiroki, U.S. Patent No. 5,989,346. Applicants respectfully disagree that Claims 14-16 and 18-23 are anticipated by Hiroki. As noted in the previously filed amendment, Hiroki does not disclose or suggest a front docking port located on an outside surface of the substrate handling chamber, the port being capable of mating with a cassette, as recited in Claim 14. In Hiroki, the docking port 9b is not on an outside surface of the handling chamber 5, but rather on an outside surface of the load lock chamber 3. In Hiroki, the substrate handling chamber 5 has gate valves 9a on an outside surface, but they are not capable of mating with the cassette 42.

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Claim 14 is therefore patentable as it is not anticipated by nor obvious in view of Hiroki. Claims 15, 16, and 18-23, which depend from and include all of the limitations of Claim 14, are therefore also patentable. Furthermore, each of the dependent claims recites further distinguishing features of particular utility.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claim 17 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hofmeister. Claim 14, from which Claim 17 depends, has been amended to recite a purgeable buffer station joined with and adjacent the substrate handling chamber. This amendment is fully supported by the specification, as originally filed, at, for example paragraphs [0035]-[0037] and Fig. 1.

As discussed above, Hofmeister does not disclose or suggest a buffer station adjacent the substrate handling chamber, as recited in Claim 14, as amended. Rather, Hofmeister only discloses buffer *cassettes* B1-B4 within the substrate handling chamber 13. Amended Claim 14 is therefore patentable over Hofmeister. Claim 17, which depends from and includes all of the limitations of Claim 14, is therefore also patentable. Furthermore, dependent Claim 17 recites further distinguishing features of particular utility.

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Conclusion

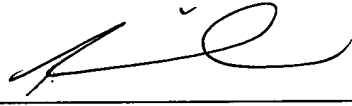
Applicants respectfully submit that all of the pending claims are patentably distinguishable over the prior art of record. The cited references, either alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention.

Please charge any additional fees, including any fees for additional extension of time, or credit overpayment to Deposit Account No. 11-1410.

Respectfully submitted,

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Dated: Sept. 6, 2005

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AMEND

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